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ABSTRACT

Teaching Organizational Culture is a powerful way to take students beyond a basic understanding of organizations. Students not only are able to glean insights to help them select an organization that best matches their own career direction, but they stand to gain a better sense of the impact they can have as leaders in the organization. This paper describes a series of observation, interview, journal, dyad, and drama activities that enable students to understand a variety of real organizations as well as gain insight into their own values, heroes, and mission. Appendixes contain the course syllabus and sample journal entry summaries. (Author/RS)

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"Did you know you are my hero"?:

An experiential approach to teaching the undergraduate organizational culture course

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ABSTRACT

Teaching Organizational Culture is a powerful way to take students beyond a basic understanding of organizations. Students not only are able to glean insights to help them select an organization that best matches their own career direction, but they stand to gain a better sense of the impact they can have as leaders in the organization. This paper describes a series of observation, interview, journal, dyad, and drama activities that enable students to understand a variety of real organizations as well gain insight into their own values, heroes, and mission.

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"Did you know you are my hero?": An experiential approach to teaching the undergraduate organizational culture course

> Leaders need to be deeply reflective, actively thoughtful, and dramatically explicit about their core values and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 379).

The notion of a leader making values "dramatically explicit" caught my attention while developing an undergraduate organizational culture course. In my graduate organizational culture course students conduct a cultural analysis of their own organization (Driskill & Brenton, 2001.). However, at the undergraduate level, I wanted to do more than explore the concept of culture and how to collect and analyze cultural data. Our majors are often in the midst of a career search and though our undergraduate organizational communication class has a section on culture, they are not engaged in significant application. The above quote became the "mantra" that guided a course that took students through the basics of the organizational cultural analysis process as well as the challenge of being "on stage" with leadership performances. After a brief overview of the main units of the course, details of this "on-stage" process are discussed along with implications for teaching organizational culture.

Text and Journal Connections

The newly "reissued" classic work on organizational culture, "Corporate Cultures," by Deal and Kennedy was selected. The preface provides a context for the original book and a springboard for later discussion on the "limits" of the strong culture approach (c.f., Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Martin, 1992). Nonetheless, the clarity of concepts and the flow of the book from elements of culture and application worked well for an undergraduate class.

A major feature of the course was to include "journal connections" for each assigned reading. Example entries, such as the ones below (c.f. Appendix B), served not

only to guide students toward connections in their organizations, but also functioned as "pre-writes" for major assignments. Thus, for example, when asked" How might you use these elements to "survive"?, students were prompted to begin to think of cultural data in terms of their functioning in the organization before they had learned about the formal process of analyzing a culture. Or, similarly, when asked, "What experiences have you had that relate to an organization having a strong culture (or lack of one?)," the class reflected on their own experiences in light of the "strong culture" concept. This entries served as a foundation for two major assignments, the "Sleuth and the Shadow Projects."

Sleuth Project

Two major assignments guided their data collection and application process. The first one was titled the "Sleuth" project because they were given direction on gathering data about the elements of culture as a detective, an insider who worked without others knowing of their goals. We discussed the reality of all organizational members consciously or unconsciously gathering, responding to, and giving shape to culture. Their challenge was to make a conscious effort to gather information that went beyond their own, current experience. For example, they were encouraged to give more attention to rituals and to values embedded in those rituals. Furthermore, as they moved through each of the four elements found in Deal and Kennedy (values, heroes, rituals, networks), they were asked to "pre-write" their final assignment with the following journal entries like:

- Create a value statement for an org. you would like to work for."
- Have you ever considered yourself an org. hero? Why or why not? Review the "hero" criteria in the text and discuss the extent to which you fit any of them.
- Have you ever created a ritual? If so, describe it. If not, when might you be prompted to do so? Under what circumstances?

On Stage with Values

The performance component of the Sleuth project involved an enactment of their core value statements. The students, after completing the readings and journal entries, worked in a dyad activity in which they had to narrow down and determine core versus from peripheral values. The "Getting Clear on Values" dyad exercise involved the following prompts:

•Ask: What is it that you most want out of your life?
Example response: *To be happy*
•Paraphrase Response: So, what you want is *to be happy, right?*

•Ask: How would you feel if you *were finally happy, really happy?*
Example response: *Successful*
•Paraphrase Response: So, what you want is *to successful, right?*

•Ask: How would you feel if you *were successful?*
Example response: *Content*
•Paraphrase Response: What you really want then is to be content, right?

•Ask: How would you feel if you were content?
Example response: Well, content, well, that is it I would feel content.

•Repeat until redundancy occurs!

While some students took a bit to warm up to the activity, our processing of their responses was powerful. They learned that this reflection on life goals helped them identify core values. At this point, they prepared to go on stage. They were first reminded that the dyad activity was as a first step toward the idea of being leaders who know their values. The next step was to learn to be explicit about those values with others. Not only was such value identification important to some future role that might have as leaders, but they realized in the processing of the activity, that their values should

guide their career selection and would determine to some extent their satisfaction with the organizations they decided to work for.

The step of "getting on stage" was akin to a brief persuasive speech in which the focus was on non-verbal communication. They were directed to only say their value statement, their core value statement in terms of a "being statement and/or a doing statement." Thus, a student might say: "I want to be content," or I am an content person." We discussed that if they had been genuine in the dyad activity, they would be convincing in the way the spoke and presented these few words. The rest of the class was instructed to stand as soon as they were convinced. The result was intriguing. Students stood, but only one at a time, some quickly, others only after the speaker had been on the spot for several minutes. Those who had to stand and speak for several minutes found their selves becoming more dramatic to convince their classmates. "More dramatic" ranged from loudness to more expansive gestures, to moving closer to the "unconvinced" classmate.

Discussing their performances and class responses was enriching. A few questions guided our discussion:

- What did you learn about persuasion?
- What did you learn about adapting to an audience?
- What made some of you stand sooner then others?
- What did you learn about the role of non-verbal communication?

Students understand from being on-stage that persuasion involved more than logical and sound arguments. They discussed how class members differed in what would bring "identification" (Burke, 1969). For some, more eye contact, others, more displays of confidence and sincerity. In all, they became more aware of the importance of congruency of nonverbal and verbal communication. They returned to this "on stage"

assignment in a final "Sleuth" presentation that required them to bring together their observations and applications of cultural data related not only to values, but to heroes, networks, and rituals.

Shadowing

After the sleuth activities, we reviewed basic observation techniques related to gathering data about major elements of culture. Then, we shifted to learning more about culture through shadowing (informal and formal interviews with key members). Students created informal interview questions growing from the Deal and Kennedy units on different types of cultures, managing and changing culture. When possible, they were encouraged to actually shadow the person and learn more through observation. In conjunction with this process, we returned to the concept of organizational heroes that had been introduced earlier. A discussion focused on an additional quote from Bolman & Deal (1997) that further explicates the central role of value-guided leaders (c.f., Frederick, 1995).

> Poetry and philosophy are rarely included in managerial training, and few business schools have asked themselves whether spiritual development is central to their mission. It is no wonder that managers are often viewed as chameleons who can adapt to any setting or as dispassionate maneuverers guided only be expediency.) .... Many of the world's legendary corporate heroes articulated their philosophies and values in such a striking way that they still live on in the behaviors and operations of their companies (p. 379).

Using the metaphor of the "medieval" hero, students were asked to reflect on the "four faces" (i.e., roles/functions) of the leader who would aspire to the above challenge. These faces included:

- **The King/Queen**--energy to do right, to take a stand
  - Organizational Ethic/Value – Excellence
  - Vision, provision and enacting courageous moral choices

- **The Knight**-- disciplined energy to "conquer"; to carry through on a task/duty
  - Organizational Ethic/Value –Justice
  - Protective discipline to carry out change and mercy

- **The Servant** (cupbearer, squire, lady in waiting)--connecting energy
  - Organizational Ethic/Value – Sacrificial Caring
  - Available and accountable, Loyal and Open

- **The Monk** (scholar, magician, priest, mentor)-- transforming energy
  - Organizational Ethic/Value – Faith
  - Passing on the secrets of life, modeling, coaching and nurturing

The objective of this second performance was " to provide the class with a thorough, compelling, and convincing account of their shadow work by summarizing insights and applications. These applications had to do with their own connection with the above "faces"—their own sense of vision for what they wanted to be now and in the future as organizational leaders. Each of the faces prompted them to reflect on core leadership responsibilities ranging from a vision for ethics to the pragmatics of mentoring.

The "Sleuth" and "Shadow" assignments set the stage for the final paper and presentation. The final presentation included a "Professional Development Contract" that had the following objective stated: "to provide the class with a thorough, compelling, and convincing account of your mission and how you will carry it out as a member of a organizational culture."

Students were challenged to engage in the following preparation steps:

1. Review the sleuth, shadow, and journal work (including notes).

2. Revise their mission statement (drafted in conjunction with their vision of an organization in their future).

3. Develop a poster with pictures that reflect their mission and vision.

4. Identify songs and video clips that further underscore their mission and vision.

5. Draft a contract/plan for enacting your mission by including a plan for each hero face:

* **The King/Queen**—your energy to do right through an ethics plan to excel.
  - What is your vision for a future organization?
  - What provision will you make now? What is your plan to develop your talents, your next steps in your professional development after this class?
  - What courageous moral choices will you need to make now and later to excel?

* **The Knight**---your discipline plan for carry through to do the right thing.
  - How will you use rituals and networks to protect core values?
  - What will you do as a symbolic manager to initiate/carry through change?
  - When will you most need to show mercy? Why will such mercy be so significant?

* **The Servant** (cupbearer, squire, lady in waiting)---your connecting plan .
  - How will you use networks and rituals to be available and accountable? Provide specific examples of the types of activities in and out of the workplace for which you know you will need to develop the capacity to be available and accountable?
  - How will you develop your capacity for loyalty? Openness?

* **The Monk** (scholar, magician, priest, mentor)---your transforming energy plan.
  - How will you invest significance in others? (In the coming weeks? Months?)
  - How might you use networks and rituals to pass on wisdom?
  - What will you need to do to improve as a model? Coach?

To add significance and meaning to the final presentation, students were asked to perform in a different meeting room. These multimedia presentation again followed the "stage" metaphor in which students were asked to stand and applaud once convinced and to ask questions for areas in the presentation that were not clear or needed elaboration.

Summary and Conclusions

This course prompted several pedagogical insights. First, the transformation of student presentations into "stage" performances informed students about their current abilities to connect with and prompt identification with a audience. Due to the initial activity on values with the emphasis on nonverbal and the focus on audience response,

students were challenged to go beyond the typical presentation format. They had to work to make their value and mission statement personal, meaningful and thus convincing.

Second, the construct of organizational culture proved to be rich trove for experiential learning activities that had real world applications. Students were able to make journal connections and immediate real world application of the elements of culture. For instance, one student noted that he was able to focus on what he wanted to get from an organization and in doing so was able to fine-tune personal goals.

Finally, the focus on organizational leadership and ethics kept the students engaged in reflecting on their own communication behaviors. As we discussed the problems in corporate USA regarding ethics and leadership, students were acutely aware of the challenge before them. The 'faces of the hero" captured the notion of an "Aristotelian ethic" (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 344) with a focus on "excellence, caring, justice, and faith." Their journal entries and performances demonstrated a sensitivity to their role in shaping a culture of ethics in their organizations.

In summary, this course accomplished what was intended. Students were able to not only understand organizational culture concepts, but were challenged to make immediate application. On a personal note, I often reminded them that part of my passion for providing such a challenge was my new role as a parent. The face of my own baby prompted me to remind them that their leadership behaviors would shape the organizational cultures that my 1-year-old son would eventually enter. They were reminded again at the end of the course that as leaders they "need to be deeply reflective, actively thoughtful, and dramatically explicit about their core values and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 379).

Appendix A: Syllabus
Organizational Culture Survival

Objectives: At the end of the semester you should be able to:

1. Define the concept "organizational culture."
2. Interpret observational data on organizational culture
3. Develop and conduct interviews organizational culture interviews.
4. Identify communication barriers to organizational survival.
5. List communication behaviors likely to promote professional growth.
6. Create a professional communication development contract.

Required Text: Deal, T. E. & Kennedy, A. (2000). Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life, Reissued with New Introduction. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Pub.

Recommended: Richmond, V. & McCrosky, J.(2001). Organizational Communication for Survival, 2nd Ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Assignments to Reach Learning Objectives

1. Organizational Communication Survival Journal
7. Organizational Culture Sleuth Project & Analysis
3. Shadowing Interviews & Analysis
4. Professional Communication Development Contract

Tentative Schedule

Week 1

Topics covered: Introduction
Our Org. Experiences
Elements and Values
Assignment: Chapter 1 in Deal and Kennedy

Week 2

Topics covered: Values
Assignments: Chap. 2 Values

Week 3

Topics covered: Org. Culture Values and You
Assignments:

8. Journal Assignments
9. In class activities on communication and values

Week 4
Topics covered: Heroes
Assignments:
1. Read Chap. 3
2. Sleuth Project on Heroes

Week 5
Topics covered: Rites and Rituals…
Assignments:
1. Read Chap. 4
10. Sleuth Project on Rituals Due

Week 6
Topics covered: Networks
Assignments:
11. Read Chap. 5 & Journal
2. Sleuth Project on Networks

Week 7
Topics covered: Project Sleuth: What we learned from Observation?
Assignments:
Presentations Due on Sleuth Project

Week 8
Topics covered: On Heroes, Rituals, Storytelling and You
Assignments: Journal Questions and Activities on Enacting Culture

Week 9
Topics covered: Types of Cultures
Assignments:
1. Chapter 6-- Identifying Culture
2. Shadowing 1 Due

Week 10
Topics covered: How to Read a Culture?
Assignments:
1. Chapter 7—Reading Culture
2. Shadowing 2 Due

Week 11
Topics covered: How to Manage Culture?
Assignments:
1. Chapter 8 Managing Culture
2. Shadowing 3 Due

Week 12
Topics covered: Changing the Culture of an Org.?
Assignments:
1. Chapter 9—Reshaping
2. Shadowing 4 Due

Week 13
Topics covered: Shadowing Presentations
Assignments:
Project Shadow: What we learned from interviews?

Week 14
Topics covered: Predicting the Future of Org. Culture?
Assignment: Chapter 10 – Cultures of the Future

Week 15
Assignments:
12. Cultures in your Future
13. Assign Prof. Dev. Contract
14. In class draft of Contract Due

Week 16
Assignment: In class draft cont.

Week 16
Oral Presentation of Prof. Comm. Dev. Contract

Appendix B: Final Journal Entry Summary

Chp. 1

- Most significant idea from this chapter for you?
- What are the elements of culture? Can you think of others not on the list?
- What experiences have you had that relate to an org. having a strong culture (or lack of one?)

Chp. 2

- State one positive and one negative value statement you could infer from orgs. you have been associated with.
- Write the value statement for one org. you are involved with now.
- Create a value statement for an org. you would like to work for.

Chp. 3

- Discuss the qualities of one of your org. heroes. Reflect on the extent these qualities reflect the text criteria.
- What is the opposite of a hero? Discuss such a person (no names) in terms of their role in the org., their impact on org. culture.
- Have you ever considered yourself an org. hero? Why or why not? Review the criteria in the text and discuss the extent to which you fit any of them.
- Provide two org. survival rules from information you might learn about culture via. a hero.

CROSS CHAPTER ENTRIES

- List of organizations you have been involved in
- List of 50 –I want out of life
- 25 statements –define success
- Stories told—Graveside story.
- List of heroes

Chp. 4

- The writers discuss a wide array of rituals. Give an example of organizational communication that would not be considered a ritual.
- Give three examples of rituals from your own org. experience.
- Based on one or more of the examples you gave; state what you can learn about an org. culture via rituals.
- What survival rules might be derived from observing rituals? Give a few examples of these survival rules based on your own experiences.
- Have you ever created a ritual? If so, describe it. If not, when might you be prompted to do so? In what org. circumstances?

Chp. 5

- Most significant idea from this chapter for you? Why?
- Provide examples of storytellers, priests, whisperers, gossips, spies, and cabals.
- How would you learn about the network
- What survival rules might be linked to the network?

Chp. 6

- Examples from your own experience of each type of culture from Chap. 6 (include combinations).
- Construct questions (min. of 5) to explore the type of culture in which you are playing "shadow." Include natural follow-up questions from sleuth projects.
- Cultures in trouble: Provide 2 examples from past or current organizations.

Chp. 7-Reading/Identifying

- Which of the 4 faces have you already developed? Which need to be developed?
- How would you develop them? (Which rituals and networks do you need to incorporate to develop the faces that you see as needing development?
- During an interview for the job of your dreams you are asked: "If you had 1 minute to convince this org. that you had the vision needed for the future, what would say?"

Chp. 8--Managing

- Most significant insights (min. 2)
- Examples of you have symbolic mangers
- Two things you would use from this chapter.

Chp. 9—Changing

- Most significant insights (min. 2)
- Examples of you related to changing culture
- Two things you would use from this chapter.

Chp. 10--Future

- 10 characteristics of my dream organization
- 10 things I would want to do with my time on the job
- The mission I want to achieve with my life is to…
- Surf the net---find an organization of the future that intrigues you.
- Find at least one and for most of you two… go beyond your shadow organization(s).

Final CROSS CHAPTER ENTRIES

1. 30 successful memories
2. Revision of mission

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